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THE SEEDS OF WAR

Not long ago a paper devoted to the spreading of radical social and political doctrines quoted an English public man as being horrified at the idea of retaliatory measures against Germany as a punishment for bringing on the war, but as affirming that it is the intention in England to insist on such measures, and so "cultivate the seeds of future wars." Such a statement as this is interesting for a great many reasons, but it is perhaps most interesting as an evidence of the cocksureness of the doctrinaire type of mind, which has no doubt but that what it disapproves of must necessarily be the seeds of war. Others, however, may not feel so certain that proving war to be unprofitable for those who resort to it is inevitably sowing the seeds of future conflicts, and it may be worth while to consider if there are not other possible seeds of war, some of which may be unsuspected by political dogmatists.

Numberless thinkers have designated the causes of war in more or less convincing fashion, but the conclusion of a nineteenth-century Frenchman will serve best to illustrate what the English public man and his American correspondent both seem to overlook. This Frenchman says that wars originate in misunderstandings, and by "misunderstandings" he means misconceptions by one nation of the purposes and character of another. This view would seem to be borne out by the perverted opinions entertained by the Germans of their enemies, but it will be necessary to apply the word to a misunderstanding of a more fundamental kind if even the recent war is to be explained. This deeper misunderstanding is an erroneous notion of what can be accomplished in this world, that is, of the limitations on the powers of individuals and of nations. The Germans believed their covetous desires capable of realization, and they undertook the war to attain political and economic supremacy by means of their army. They thought they could do it, but they misunderstood the power of non-material forces, and it was this misunderstanding that led them to do what hate and suspicion alone might not have been sufficient to cause.

This misunderstanding will be possible as long as human nature remains what it is. It is, of course, to be hoped that less and less gross exhibitions of it will occur as knowledge and experience become greater, but some things in present-day civilization cultivate this particular error, and it is a question whether extreme radicalism is not one of the greatest of them.

The fact that extreme radicalism cultivates erroneous notions of what is possible is shown by the French Revolution and by the present Russian chaos. Lenine and Trotsky may have been in German pay, but their followers have certainly not all been corrupted by Teutonic bribes, and if these did not believe in the feasibility of the fantastic and visionary doctrines they profess, Russia would not be to-day a breeding place of political and social disorders more threatening to civilization than the German autocracy ever was in its recently ended war against humanity.

It seems anomalous that radicalism should have this effect, for it professes enlightened and unselfish aims, and is a manifestation of liberalism, to which modern civilization owes more than it does to any other influence. Extreme liberals, however, illustrate Aristotle's axiom that a virtue in excess is a vice, and Madame Roland's own experience, as well as the course of history, justifies modifying her famous utterances to: "O liberalism, what tyrannies have been perpetrated by your extreme devotees!"

Yet it isn't only the excess of liberalism that makes it a vice, for there are certain tenets in the liberal creed that are peculiarly likely to prove dangerous guides to the human intellect. John Stuart Mill was perhaps the most complete expositor of its doctrines, and some of the things he says indicate what may be its weaknesses.

Mill says, for instance: "The liberal looks forward for his principles of government; a tory looks backward." This seems to put the liberal in the progressive class and make the tory a reactionary. It is like applying the parable of the Greek philosopher to the tory. According to this parable, if you hold a stick before a herd of sheep the leader will jump over it, and even if the stick is withdrawn, every succeeding sheep will jump at that spot just because his predecessor has done so. It may be

true that the Tories who persistently adhere to the practices of the past are like the too-imitative sheep, but it doesn't follow that it is an entirely safe proceeding to look entirely to the future for principles. It is obviously proper to look to the future for improvement and for a realization of an ideal, but it is equally obvious that the past must be studied to avoid previous mistakes and to perceive what principles govern human society. If the past is not a demonstration of what is feasible, it certainly is a warning against many things that are dangerous or incapable of realization, and for this negative reason alone it is worth studying, even if we do not believe that civilization is a growing organism, the laws of whose development may be perceived from the course of human history.

It is thus an unsafe thing to base legislation on speculation alone, but there is a special reason why the liberal, or at least the believer in Mill's doctrines, should not do it. All knowledge is experience, says Mill, following Locke, Hume, and other rationalistic founders of modern philosophy; so to try to disregard human experience in social and political matters does not seem very reasonable in those who attach such extreme importance to logical consistency. Of course Mill would argue that liberals only mean to disregard the irrational practices of the past, not its admonitions or lessons, but even the most scholarly liberal writers have shown a marked temporal provinciality, that is, a disposition to judge all periods according to modern standards, while the extreme liberal is usually fanatically contemptuous of the past.

Another thing that makes liberalism, even in its temperate manifestations, likely to cultivate a one-sided view, is the rationalistic basis of its convictions. Lord Morley associates the movement with positivism, that is, with the doctrine that only sensibly or intellectually perceptible things are significant. It is as if he reversed the invective of Jude from: "In what they know naturally as brute beasts, in that they corrupt themselves." to: "By what we perceive with our senses or measure with our minds alone can we exalt ourselves."

The result of this extreme rationalism, while undoubtedly a salutary check to superstition and dogmatism, is, however, an

exaggerated trust in mechanical schemes of government. Anything that does not definitely provide for all possible contingencies is distrusted by these political Gradgrinds. One of the most obvious things demonstrated by history is that successful governments have always been guided by some sort of intuition in their leaders. The machinery of government, even a philistine admits, is not what gives efficiency; it is the end towards which the machinery is directed. It is not the excellence of a nation's laws so much as the intelligence and integrity of the men who administer them, and the enlightenment of the public sentiment that supports them that determines their worth, and that worth is increased when latitude is given to realize their spirit instead of imposing adherence to their letter. The ultra rationalistic liberal, however, distrusts anything so immaterial as intuition. He distrusts it because it is superrational, and because he wants to direct the future with the same exactness that the extreme tory is directed by the past. Intuition is a variable thing, and there must be nothing irregular in the scheme of government to foster or shelter abuses as superstition did in the theocracies of the past, says the extreme liberal, and to avoid this danger he is likely to devote so much attention to devising elaborate governmental mechanism that he neglects or ignores the far more important power that operates it, that is, the intelligence and the sentiment of the governors and the governed.

Still another prominent characteristic of the liberal, according to Mill, is "a desire for unity with one's fellow-creatures." This looks like a wholly virtuous desire, and no doubt it expresses a very noble purpose; but it can also, in excess, obviously lead to much evil, although that is likely to be overlooked in a humanitarian age.

The desire for agreement with our fellow-creatures may make us indifferent to truths not generally perceived or appreciated. It may cause us to prefer mediocrity to superiority, because adopting the standards of mediocrity will bring us into agreement with the largest proportion of our fellow-creatures. This, of course, is directly counter to the philosophy based on Darwinism, which the extreme liberals make their gospel; for if evolution only is possible by the development of the superior type,

why cultivate the lower order? The parallel may not be exact between the biological and the social world, for there may be considerable artificial selection in human society that makes the ruling or the property-holding classes far from representing the superior individuals by which, among animals, the species is modified for the better. Nevertheless it is plain that the progress of civilization is due to a relatively few individuals who, aided by favorable environment, gifted by superior natural endowment, or driven by stern necessity, have extended human knowledge or power, just as certain animals have perpetuated or extended their species by showing superior ability to modify their physical powers to suit their environment. Being in agreement with one's fellow-creatures is thus not the most certain way to ensure that we are forwarding civilization, even according to the reasoning of those who profess it as one of their chief virtues.

Another thing about liberalism that makes it peculiarly subject to error is the fact that it has developed, as has frequently been pointed out, coincidently with the growth of sympathy in modern society. Sympathy is one of the noblest emotions that can fill the human breast, but it is, perhaps for that very reason, one of the most dangerous. Sympathy without discrimination may lead us to commiserate the criminal when the interests of society demand that we should be relentless toward the crime. The liberal, however, according to Mill's definition of his qualities, is far more likely to be conscious of the suffering criminal, who is definite and concrete, than he is of the outraged law, which is not a material thing and not impressive to his matter-of-fact intellect. Therefore we have much in the way of maudlin sentimentality about prison reform and the abolition of capital punishment emanating from persons of liberal pretensions. This is often nothing but pushing indulgence in sympathy so far as to make its objects include evil as well as good, and this certainly is a dangerous thing to do, for it means cultivating a disposition to sympathize with lawlessness and violence, and that is what we find advanced radicals constantly doing.

The way in which extreme advocates of liberty have contributed to the success of the absolutism they opposed so violently, as in the case of Rome and eighteenth-century France, where their

excesses paved the way for a despotism, may be explained by the pronounced human tendency to swing from one extreme to the other. In the case of the Russian Bolsheviki, however, we have an open alliance between radicalism and autocracy, and it is harder to account for voluntary coöperation than for unwilling assistance. Yet a possible explanation may be suggested by a remark of Augustine Birrell to the effect that liberalism is a state of mind rather than a creed. This is not a very startling statement, for all creeds are nothing but manifestations of states of mind, and liberalism has no monopoly of that characteristic. What is to be remembered, though, is that similar states of mind may result in the development of opposite convictions. Hume has pointed out how intense enthusiasm for one's own native region can be traced to an egotistic disposition to exalt those things with which we are associated, and that the very same disposition will cause us to depreciate native and extol foreign things if, by residence abroad or other personal connection, doing so serves to emphasize our distinction. The selfish rich man insists on the sanctity of property; the selfish poor violently attack wealth, but the state of mind of both is identical; it is simply the habit of thinking in accordance with the most obvious self-interest. In the case of the autocracy of Germany and the maximalist democracy of Russia we have just this situation. Both have the desire to realize gross material aspirations by the employment of force. The German ruling class seeks to exploit the things that it possesses; inherited power and property, and all the privileges of the mediæval social system. The Bolsheviki, on the other hand, desire to destroy these things, but that doesn't make their philosophy different from that of the Germans, for both alike seek only to make such changes as will be to their own advantage. In algebra if we reverse signs we get the same result, and the German Junkers and the Russian Bolsheviki may simply be the positive and negative aspects of the same thing, that is, direct and unqualified self-interest.

But there are other things that unite the radical maximalists and the reactionary militarists. Both are grossly materialistic, and yet both put excessive trust in visionary theories that material knowledge proves impossible, and only vanity and folly

make credible. The Bolsheviki, with their fatuous notions that the war could be ended and society entirely reformed by adopting their plans, are no worse than the German imperialists, with their implicit trust that the course of the war would follow their predictions, and that holy wars, insurrections in India, hyphenated domination of the United States, and many other much more fantastic things could all be invoked to aid them.

These and other elements of the state of mind of the Bolsheviki and their supposed German opposites may establish an instinctive sympathy between them, and this sympathy may explain why the Bolsheviki, while preaching extreme democracy, have worked feverishly to assist autocracy. Many apparent anomalies in history can perhaps be explained if we assume that men, besides struggling to achieve their conscious aims, are instinctively led to attempt to perpetuate the types of which they feel themselves to be the representatives; so that not only is it true that extremes meet, but they are also often identical intrinsically. Charles Lamb says that man may be divided into two classes: those who borrow, and those who lend; and it may be that this whimsical absurdity has some truth in it. Certainly it would seem as though, if men were divided according to their fundamental convictions, we should have two classes: one of which believes in the possibility of the fool's paradise, while the other recognizes the law that action and reaction are equal, and that, consequently, possession or achievement necessitates compensating sacrifice or labor. The Bolsheviki had foolish notions that refusing to fight would end the war; the German militarists had equally fantastic ideas about the will to victory being decisive, that is, that they would win because they desired to do so more vehemently than their enemies, just as if a child were sure to get the moon if it cried loudly enough for it. These things and many others show a similar state of mind in the radical Bolsheviki of Russia and the reactionary militarists of Germany, the two elements that did most to cause and prolong the greatest of all wars, and may we not assume that in this state of mind we have something which may be regarded as the seeds of war?

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